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Bosnia and Herzegovina

Stop ethnic discrimination in access to employment

Workers who lost their jobs during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are still fighting for reparation: compensation; pensions; and the right to work without discrimination.

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, ethnic discrimination led to thousands of workers being unfairly dismissed from their jobs. This was often the first phase of what later came to be called "ethnic cleansing".

The 1995 Dayton Agreement, signed by all parties to the conflict, included commitments to encourage and create favourable conditions for the return of people who had fled or were forcibly displaced during the war, and guaranteed their right to return.

However, ethnic discrimination in employment continues to be a major obstacle to the sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the country. Many of those unfairly dismissed during the war are still fighting for reparation - including compensation, pension rights, and for the right to work without discrimination.

Without the right to work and financial security, those who fled their homes cannot hope to return and contribute to rebuilding multi-ethnic communities.

"During the war we wanted to keep the factory going, even though it was being shelled. But then they [Aluminij's management] fired us, because we were Serbs or Muslims. I don't say I am a dismissed worker; I say I am a Serb worker, and that's why I was asked not to return to work"

Nebojša Spajic, a former employee of the Aluminij factory, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Read more on this issue in this month's *The Wire*

Write to the Managing Director of Aluminij, urging that Aluminij honour and respect its obligations to unfairly dismissed workers and to implement anti-discrimination policies and working practices.

Dear Mr. Brajkovic

I am writing to express my concern about unfair dismissals of people from Aluminij from 1992 onwards, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the continuing failure to provide them with redress and reparation. Ongoing ethnic discrimination poses serious obstacles to the sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The right to work without discrimination is enshrined in international standards and treaties, in the Dayton Agreement and in domestic legislation. In the workplace, this can only be effectively achieved through comprehensive anti-discriminatory policies and practice. I therefore strongly urge you to:

- fully and actively engage in efforts to find a permanent solution guaranteeing the rights of former workers who were unfairly dismissed on ethnic grounds during the war, including reinstatement or adequate compensation, and pension rights.
- ensure equality of opportunity and working conditions in Aluminij, as provided for in national legislation and the UN Norms for Business; to eliminate discrimination in employment on any grounds; and to ensure that the right to work without discrimination is fully respected.

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Dear Mr Mijo Brajkovic

The communities of Mostar remain divided, despite the reconstruction of the bridge connecting them.
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